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The Two Gurnets

By ALICE H. BIGELOW

During a brief incarceration in my bedroom, I took account of the pictures which adorn it. The mantel and the walls have their share; and the mirror, because it is a woman's mirror, has a small bright water color the size of a postal stuck in its frame. In this collection four pictures record the Gurnets. The plural form of course stamps the user as no longer young, because, for many years, there has been only one light.

One picture is a good water color made from Saquish head, and shows one light. One picture is a five cent colored postal from Plymouth, showing Plymouth beach and far beyond it, Saquish and the Gurnet point, with one light. A gay little watercolor by Marian Huckins, one of the great Powder Pointers, sets a single lighthouse in the sun, against a sapphire sea that leads away to Manomet. On the mantel stands an old pen and ink sketch by Marian's mother, signed Eva Huckins, and this sketch shows twin lighthouses—for twins they were when my generation first knew them.

To this list there could be added, as a foot note, a shining black body-lying-across the bottom of my bed. Contented sleep holds in cover the gleaming eyes that throw their yellow light out on the world when they are in action. He was born to a gypsy cat, and I picked him out from under a Duxbury lilac bush at the age of six inches. At the sight of those bright yellow eyes in their black setting I said impulsively "Gurnets!" And Gurnets he was and is, and to that name he responds, to go to walk or to savor a loved morsel of fish from a tin.

From Powder Point the two lights were in line and we saw only one, but elsewhere we saw the little white towers as two, and always thought and spoke of them as twins. We sailed down there occasionally and beat up the Gurnet Creek to the landing set up by the government for the motor boat that carried the workers to Plymouth for supplies and vacations. When a half-mile bridge was flung across the channel, the youth of the Point found it a pleasant walk to the Gurnets, which stood four and a half miles from the bridge. Inside the earthworks which were piled up for defence in 1777, I saw a 100-foot well, where the walkers may eat a lunch and enjoy a reward.

The earthworks saw a little action in the Revolution. A British ball pierced the lighthouse, and the frigate which fired it stuck on Brown's Island for its pains.

At an early age we were all escorted around the lights by the keeper. Growing old enough to sail our own boats, we occasionally dared to put a nose out around the Gurnets, to tag the whistling buoy which then lay a mile off shore. Then we remembered with shivers of pleasure that the keeper had told us that all shipping which passed him, great and small, down to a 15-foot catboat, went into daily records to be forwarded to Washington. It was something to be on that list.

The great head on which the light stands is prominent on the coast. The small boat from the Mayflower sighted it on her way over from Provincetown on that bitter night in December when, with a broken mast and a broken rudder, she made port in the lee of Clark's Island. The Gurnet point and the island were then heavily forested. Before Plymouth was ten years old, a little boat from Boston was lost off that point on its way to visit the older town. Early the Pilgrims named the point for an English fish better known as the gunnard. In 1768 the point received a marking light of two lanterns on a single base. In 1803 the twin towers followed. For economy's sake these gave way at last to a single flash light. Windsor's history credits the soil of that area as being rich and fertile, like that of its neighbor, Clark's Island, famous for its yellow turnips.

The geological relations of the Gurnet point and Saquish head and the island; whether any two were joined together by the tides, and any two were separated by the same, are pleasant arguments for winter evenings. Add to that the ancient claim that Brown's Island, the mighty sand flat, really was an island, with tree stumps on it, and you have something to talk about.

The single Gurnet now stands in scientific perfection, supported by the fog horn which works happily and efficiently by machinery. A body of trained men maintains the life-saving station and patrols the beach at night.

The cool air and fine view have brought a settlement of houses, till that bleak point has become a little sophisticated. But there are a few who remember it as lonely and bare, the lights are double, and to whom it will always be "The Gurnets."